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Building Multicultural Personality Through Religious Moderation In Early Childhood Education: Case Study in Ponorogo

Ratna Nila Puspitasari[1]✉, Siti Zazak Soraya[2]
Pendidikan Islam Anak Usia Dini, Institut Agama Islam Negeri Ponorogo, Indonesia(1)
Tadris Ilmu Pendidikan Sosial, Institut Agama Islam Negeri Ponorogo, Indonesia(2)
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Abstract
Integrating religious moderation into early childhood education is an important approach to forming multicultural personalities in children. This research explores the application of religious moderation in early childhood education and its impact on children's growth and development. This research involved using a qualitative case study method, which involved six teachers from three kindergartens in Ponorogo. Data collection was carried out through interviews, observation, and document analysis, with data analysis following an interactive model that included data collection, condensation, display, and verification. The findings reveal that religious moderation forms a multicultural personality using culture-based activities that can develop cultural empathy and accommodation towards local culture, routine ceremonies and those included in learning activities develop open-mindedness and national commitment, religious activities develop flexibility and tolerance, and fair treatment of teachers and principals. schools and students develop emotional stability and anti-violence, and social activities develop social initiative and tolerance. Although there are challenges, such as differences in religious viewpoints and difficulties in integrating national and local curricula, the benefits include reducing excessive religious fanaticism and encouraging empathy and tolerance.

Keywords: *early childhood; multicultural personality; religious moderation.*

✉ Corresponding author :
Email Address : ratnanila@iainponorogo.ac.id (Ponorogo, Indonesia)
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Introduction

Religious moderation in early childhood education is crucial in Indonesia, a nation rich in ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity. This diversity, according to Adri Lundeto (2021), has a dual nature: it can either be a blessing that enriches shared life or a challenge that, if poorly managed, can lead to tension and conflict. In this context, religious moderation in early childhood education becomes an essential intervention to harness diversity as a strength.

At an early age, children are in a critical developmental phase that significantly influences the formation of their character and values. Education during this stage lays the foundation for instilling values of tolerance, mutual respect, and acceptance of differences, equipping them for life in a pluralistic society. Religious moderation not only teaches children to understand their own religious beliefs but also to respect those of others, thereby fostering

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a strong sense of mutual respect in a diverse society. Through education in religious moderation, children are encouraged to recognize the importance of peace, empathy, and tolerance, which are expected to create a generation capable of fostering harmony amidst diversity and actively contributing to sustainable social peace.

Early childhood education is crucial for instilling values of diversity and religious tolerance due to children's heightened receptivity to new experiences. This period is ideal for fostering a multicultural personality through religious moderation. By focusing on these values early on, educators can help shape a child's understanding of and appreciation for different cultural and religious backgrounds, laying the groundwork for a more inclusive and respectful society.

The primary goal of integrating religious moderation into early childhood education is to foster a harmonious and inclusive society. It involves embedding core values such as tolerance, respect, and understanding into the curriculum for children from various cultural and religious backgrounds (Maykel Verkuyten and Melanie Killen, 2021). Research conducted in Indonesian preschools shows that emphasizing religious moderation and cultural diversity within the curriculum plays a vital role in developing children's sense of identity and empathy (Irfan Tamwifi et al., 2023). The studies highlight how children actively engage with and explore different cultures and religions, reflecting the positive effects of such educational approaches on their attitudes toward diversity. This engagement helps children understand and appreciate cultural differences and prepares them to interact constructively with diverse individuals in the future.

Recognizing the critical nature of the early childhood phase, marked by rapid physical, emotional, and intellectual growth, (Syamsul Hadi Untung et al., 2023) educators and parents play pivotal roles that extend beyond addressing the six developmental aspects to optimize this growth (Qorina Azizah, 2022). Their responsibilities encompass the physical and intellectual dimensions and the crucial task of instilling tolerance, mutual respect, cooperation, and empathy among children within a multicultural context.

Within this context, understanding and respect for diverse religions become imperative. An incomplete comprehension of specific religious teachings can lead to deviant behaviour, potentially causing individuals to believe their actions are justified. Early childhood education, encompassing the comprehensive development of children aged 0-6, significantly influences their physical, emotional, and intellectual growth (Sri Haryanto and Robingun Suyud El Syam, 2023). This developmental phase is considered a golden age due to its tremendous impact on cognitive abilities. Appropriate stimulation and guidance during this period significantly shape a child's beliefs and behaviours. The significance of education at this stage should be noticed, as the experiences and values imparted during this period can potentially mould a child's character in the future. One crucial aspect to highlight in early childhood education is religious moderation, involving a balanced and inclusive teaching of profound religious values. Proper guidance during this formative period can significantly influence a child's future character, so incorporating religious moderation into the educational framework is essential.

Despite the potential benefits, not all children exhibit age-appropriate behaviours. Aggressive behaviour, often observed during play, if left unaddressed, may escalate into more complex issues, such as intolerance and bullying based on culture and religion. Early childhood bullying includes behaviours like exclusion, name-calling, physical aggression, and psychological harm (Olivia N. Saracho, 2017). Studies in Jakarta revealed that some kindergarten children are observed limiting friendships based on religion and gender, reflecting an early understanding of intolerance (Fachrur Rozie, 2019). A study conducted by child protection advocate Rostiyen Ilyas, as cited by Rahnang et al., showed that numerous preschool children engage in intolerant actions, such as inquiring about the religion of their playmates and avoiding interaction with those of different faiths (Rahnang Rahnang et al., 2022). This conduct is likely shaped by the imitation of adults, especially their parents and

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teachers. Therefore, the comprehensive approach to early childhood education, focusing on religious moderation, becomes an essential foundation for nurturing a generation that embraces diversity and fosters harmonious coexistence.

Religious moderation involves adopting a balanced and moderate approach to religious practices, avoiding extremes, and refraining from imposing beliefs on others (Babun Suharto et al., 2019). The Ministry of Religious Affairs in Indonesia emphasizes four core principles within this concept. The first principle underscores a national commitment, prioritizing values that strengthen unity and solidarity. The second principle opposes violence in religious teachings, advocating for peaceful understanding. The third principle encourages a tolerant attitude, promoting mutual respect for diverse beliefs. Finally, accepting local traditions emphasizes the importance of cultural harmony by aligning religious values with indigenous practices. Collectively, these principles contribute to fostering a moderate, inclusive, and respectful religious atmosphere in Indonesia.

The study conducted by Nurdin and Muqowim on implementing religious moderation at Raudhatul Athfal UIN Sunan Kalijaga in Indonesia highlighted the educators' comprehensive understanding and application of moderation values (Muh Nur Islam Nurdin and Muqowim Muqowim, 2023). It emphasised tolerance through various educational themes, national ceremonies, anti-violence measures, and local cultural activities in early childhood education. Then, Anwar Zain's study further underscored the effectiveness of specific activities, such as introducing positive qualities and promoting religious tolerance, in fostering tolerance among early childhood education students at PAUD Widya Dharma in Banjarmasin (Anwar Zain, 2022). The novelty of this research lies in the specific emphasis on the application of religious moderation in shaping multicultural personalities in early childhood education. While previous studies addressed specific aspects of religious tolerance, this research attempts to integrate religious moderation as a primary foundation to minimize the potential for discriminatory or intimidating actions.

The integration of religious moderation programs into early childhood education is proposed to address challenges such as weakening cultural resilience, insufficient character education, and inadequate promotion of Indonesian culture. Religious moderation is essential for creating inclusive environments that bridge cultural, ethnic, and religious divides. By incorporating these principles into early education, immediate problems like intolerance and aggression are addressed while preparing children for a future where cultural and religious diversity is expected. Embedding these values in the curriculum equips children with the skills and attitudes needed to thrive in a multicultural society. This proactive approach helps prevent prejudices and biases by fostering an environment that celebrates differences rather than fearing them. It emphasizes that religious and cultural diversity enriches society, laying the groundwork for a more inclusive community.

In Ponorogo, a region celebrated for its cultural diversity, applying religious moderation principles in early childhood education aims to foster a nurturing atmosphere for children from varied backgrounds. Preliminary research has shown that institutions like Islamic Kindergarten, General Kindergarten, and State Kindergarten have successfully incorporated religious moderation into their programs. These kindergartens promote tolerance and respect through their activities and interactions, highlighting the significance of instilling these values early on. This approach not only aids in developing well-rounded individuals but also enhances cultural identity and social cohesion within the community, laying the foundation for a more harmonious society.

In addition, these institutions have integrated local cultural traditions into their curricula, further enriching the learning experience and reinforcing the importance of diversity. By blending religious moderation with cultural education, children are encouraged to appreciate both their heritage and that of others, promoting mutual understanding from an early age. The success of these programs reflects the growing recognition of the need for inclusive education that bridges cultural and religious differences. This model can serve as a

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blueprint for other regions seeking to cultivate similar values in their early childhood education systems. Ultimately, such initiatives build a society grounded in respect, empathy, and unity amidst diversity.

Although there is prior research on diversity and early childhood education in Indonesia, there still needs to be more comprehension regarding how religious moderation influences the development of multicultural personalities in early childhood. This study aims to Incorporating religious moderation in early childhood education plays a significant role in developing a multicultural personality, as it fosters an understanding and appreciation of diverse beliefs from an early age. However, implementing such programs presents both challenges and advantages; educators may encounter resistance from parents or cultural biases, yet they also have the opportunity to create inclusive environments that promote harmony and respect among children. The role of educators is crucial in this process, as they not only facilitate discussions about religious diversity but also model inclusive behaviors, thereby nurturing multicultural values that can shape children's perspectives and interactions in a diverse society.

Methodology

The methodological approach of this study employed qualitative. According to Creswell, qualitative research is an approach to exploring and understanding individuals or groups' meaning of a human or social problem (J.W. Creswell, 2014). Furthermore, Bogdan and Biklen in Sugiyono state that qualitative research has five features: naturalistic, descriptive data, process-oriented, inductive, and meaningful (Sugiyono, 2013). Some scholars mention that those characteristics can also be called the strengths of qualitative research. Specifically, the methodological approach of this study carried a case study. This approach allows for an in-depth examination of the particular phenomenon being studied. A case study was chosen because the research aimed to analyze the construction of a multicultural personality through religious moderation in early childhood education. Researchers gain deeper insights into the contextual factors influencing the subject by focusing on a specific case. The case study approach also offers flexibility in capturing detailed data through various qualitative techniques, enabling a comprehensive exploration of the subject matter.

The research focuses on kindergarten teachers and principals at Islamic Kindergarten, General Kindergarten, and State Kindergarten. Participants were selected based on their teaching experience of over 5 years. The study is set in Ponorogo regency, chosen for its school accreditation and the diverse backgrounds of its students, particularly in terms of religion, race, and socio-economic status. The study began in November 2023 and will run until October 2024. This setting allows the researcher to observe the dynamics of multicultural education and religious moderation in diverse environments. Through this, the research aims to understand how these educational institutions integrate religious moderation into early childhood education. Primary data sources include interviews and observations with six people, three principals, and three teachers. The other sources are books, journals, and articles related to the data sought. There are some ways of collecting data in this study. They are interview, observation, and document.

Marshall and Rossman, (2014) stated that data analysis is the process of bringing instruction, structure, and interpretation to the mass collected data. The purpose of data analysis is to find out the relationship among the categories of data. The researcher analyzed using the interactive model proposed by J Miles, et.al (2014). There are three critical stages, namely data collection; data condensation; data display; and drawing and verifying conclusion. There are various ways to check the validity of data. In this study, the researcher employed triangulation and perseverance of observation. The triangulation method involves comparing results obtained through different methods to ensure consistency. Method triangulation helps identify discrepancies and reinforces the reliability of the findings by corroborating data collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis.

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Meanwhile, perseverance of observation was applied to gather thorough insights and a deeper understanding of the participants' behaviors and interactions. By maintaining a consistent observational presence, the researcher could capture the nuances of the educational environment and its dynamics. These combined strategies strengthen the validity and provide a more reliable and comprehensive analysis of the research topic.

Result and Discussion

Integration of Religious Moderation in Early Childhood Education to Shape a Multicultural Personality

Instilling religious moderation values in early childhood is crucial in forming a multicultural personality. Educational institutions play a strategic role in breaking the cycle of violence in the name of religion. Therefore, religious moderation should be taught to students from an early age to foster harmonious relationships with teachers, peers, and the surrounding community. This way, children can learn to coexist with individuals from different religious, belief, racial, and ethnic backgrounds. Early childhood, defined as children aged 0-6 years, is considered a golden age and a sensitive period where they are particularly receptive to stimuli from their surroundings. Therefore, external influences are significant in shaping their character. Character education in educational institutions aims to introduce and instil important values, such as knowledge, intelligence, willpower, and tangible actions to realize these values. Early childhood education aims to provide stimuli that assist children in their developmental processes. Through well-structured learning activities, children are expected to develop the skills and abilities needed to face future educational levels. Therefore, mainstreaming religious moderation must be a primary concern in early childhood education.

Cultural-Based Activities

Culture is a fundamental element in society that is passed down through education in families, schools, and communities. In the context of character education, it is crucial to prioritize noble cultural values so that they can be preserved and internalized in future generations (Amirulah Datuk and Arifin, 2020). This way, children can recognize, understand, and love the culture and local products around them. Introducing local culture to children is essential, especially in facing the challenges of globalization that can erode moral and cultural values. Local wisdom is knowledge communities gain through experiences and integration with the surrounding environment and culture (Lis Supiatman et al., 2023). The diverse cultural heritage, such as folktales, rituals, and creativity, provides opportunities for children to learn and address problems they encounter. By teaching local cultural values, children understand their culture's origins and appreciate the cultural diversity present in society. In this context, culture-based activities play a vital role in building character and identity in children. Through traditional games, folktales, and artistic activities, children can develop self-confidence, creativity, and social skills necessary for daily life (George S. Morrison et.al., 2012).

Three models can be implemented to preserve culture: imitation, habituation, and appeal. The success of instilling cultural values in education must involve collaboration between schools, families, and communities. The three kindergartens in Ponorogo strive to instil religious moderation and multicultural personalities in children, which is expected to shape a more tolerant and appreciative generation of diversity. General kindergarten, the integration of religious moderation is carried out through a comprehensive multicultural approach. The principal emphasizes that "All humans are born equal; education makes them different." Activities include celebrating significant holidays from various religions and teaching local languages. At state kindergarten, the curriculum includes various cultural events and religious holiday celebrations to teach the values of tolerance. Cultural festivals involving dance performances, traditional games, and craft exhibitions help children understand the importance of respecting different cultural backgrounds. Meanwhile, at Islamic kindergarten, religious moderation is integrated through an emphasis on local culture

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and religious practices. They incorporate local culture into the curriculum and teach religious values through consistent habituation methods, such as batik-making and learning Javanese songs.

Culture-based activities can indicate a multicultural personality, particularly in fostering cultural empathy and religious moderation, which encompasses accommodation towards local cultures. By engaging in these activities, children learn to appreciate the richness of their own culture while being respectful and accommodating toward others (Socorro G. Herrera et.al., 2020). In this context, culture-based activities preserve local culture and act as a tool for developing social skills and empathy in children. By involving children in activities that highlight cultural diversity, they learn to appreciate differences and build positive relationships with others. Therefore, with this comprehensive and integrated approach, it is hoped that children will understand their culture and appreciate the diversity around them. These culture-based activities have great potential in shaping children's characters to be tolerant and open to differences, ultimately creating a better generation in the future.

Routine Ceremonies and Their Inclusion in the Learning Program 'My Country'

Routine ceremonies at educational institutions are crucial for instilling national values in young children (Amstrong Harefa et al., 2022). These ceremonies, held every Monday, are not just formalities; they provide opportunities for children to connect with their identity and learn about national values. All kindergartens (TK) in Ponorogo regularly conduct these ceremonies, including Islamic Kindergarten, General Kindergarten, and State Kindergarten.

The routine ceremonies across these three kindergartens illustrate that these activities introduce national values and help develop social skills and cultural empathy in children. Children learn about the importance of cooperation, accountability, and discipline through direct participation. It builds a solid character and fosters positive interactions with their environment. Moreover, these ceremonies promote open-mindedness. Engaging children in conversations about national values encourages them to think critically and welcome diverse perspectives (Nomisha Kurian, 2024). This open-mindedness is vital to a multicultural personality, where children learn to appreciate diversity and communicate effectively in various contexts.

By merging these ceremonies with the "My Country" learning theme, it is intended that children will not only grasp national values conceptually but also apply them in their everyday lives. These activities lay the groundwork for developing a generation that is committed to national values and exhibits tolerance and respect for the diverse society around them. This research aligns with the findings of Fauziah, which indicate that routine ceremonies can effectively promote a sense of nationalism and cultural identity among young learners (Zumrotul Fauziah, 2021). These ceremonies allow children to engage with their national heritage, fostering an appreciation for their culture.

Through participation in these ceremonies, children cultivate open-mindedness, a crucial indicator of a multicultural personality. They are taught to comprehend and accept differences, aligning with the principles of religious moderation. Furthermore, the national commitment emphasized in these activities reinforces religious moderation by prioritizing national interests over personal or group agendas. This holistic approach contributes to developing a multicultural personality characterized by cultural empathy and religious moderation.

Religious Activities

The formation of a multicultural personality in early childhood education institutions is closely related to the role of religious activities. Based on observations, multicultural education in the context of religion is visible through tolerance in ritual activities, learning, and celebrating religious holidays. According to Mhd Imam Zuhdi Nst and Vicky Kurniawan, (2023), the attitude of religious tolerance involves the application of mutual respect and

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honouring the beliefs held by others. In a multicultural environment, children are taught that differences should not lead to conflict but serve as opportunities to learn and grow together.

Lukman Hakim Saifuddin (2019), emphasizes that religious moderation is a process of understanding and practicing religious teachings somewhat balanced. Flexibility is crucial because children must learn to adapt to various viewpoints and religious practices. Through inclusive religious activities, they are not only equipped with knowledge about their own beliefs but are also taught to appreciate and understand the beliefs of others (M. Daheri, 2022).

Introducing and instilling tolerance values are essential, especially for young children entering preschool, as it will significantly impact their ability to face religious and cultural diversity in the future. This process can begin with fostering mutual respect for peers' work, refraining from mocking less impressive results and cultivating the habit of asking for permission before borrowing a friend's belongings. Instilling such behaviours will foster a sense of mutual respect among children. Similarly, teachers should apply these principles in the learning process, ensuring children feel valued and acknowledged. To instil tolerance and flexibility values, teachers can introduce these concepts to children, provide stimuli for them to think about these values, and help them experience the benefits of tolerance (Dan Mamlok, 2023). Teachers have systematically organized these activities to ensure that children understand religious moderation in carrying out their respective religious activities.

In conclusion, the strategies implemented by teachers in conveying multicultural education to students involve the contributions approach and the additive approach. Banks stated that the contributions approach emphasizes the importance of recognizing the diversity of people around us, enabling students to understand that differences are gifts. Meanwhile, the additive approach supplements curriculum materials and perspectives without altering its fundamental characteristics (James A. Banks, 2014). In this way, students' cultural and religious diversity knowledge will expand.

Fair Treatment of Teachers towards Students

The fair treatment of teachers towards students significantly influences the creation of emotional stability, which is one of the indicators of multicultural personality. Emotional stability is essential for building a conducive learning environment, especially in schools with diverse backgrounds such as religion, ethnicity, and culture (Chengchen Li, Jian Huang, and Banban Li, 2021). In multicultural education, emotional stability is closely linked to anti-violence attitudes integrated through religious moderation. In this case, the indicators of religious moderation involve the avoidance of violence in both physical and verbal forms, as well as the application of a compassionate approach in social interactions.

At Islamic Kindergarten, General Kindergarten, and State Kindergarten, anti-violence education is implemented through the fair treatment of teachers towards all students, regardless of their religious or ethnic backgrounds. Teachers ensure that each student is treated equally and valued, thus fostering emotional stability that supports the learning process (Lisa Bardach,et.al., 2022). For example, at general kindergarten, teachers accommodate the worship needs of children from various religions by providing unique rooms for each faith. This step demonstrates flexibility and teaches students to coexist peacefully despite their different backgrounds. Consequently, an anti-violence attitude is indirectly instilled in children through respect for diversity.

Additionally, teachers at state Kindergarten and Islamic Kindergarten also implement anti-violence education by avoiding harsh communication and striving to maintain students' emotional stability. Teachers play an active role in creating a harmonious and respectful classroom atmosphere (Nuan Luo et al., 2022). This approach not only shapes children's personalities to be more patient and empathetic but also teaches the importance of religious moderation, where each child is taught to respect differences in beliefs without conflict or violence.

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Anti-violence education is also integrated through enjoyable learning methods such as storytelling, field trips, and environmental awareness. These methods help develop emotionally stable, compassionate children who can avoid violent actions. For instance, at Islamic kindergarten, teachers encourage children to memorize prayers, Asmaul Husna, and read the Quran, which fosters spirituality and helps cultivate mutual respect and love for one another.

Solidarity Activities

Social activities at Islamic Kindergarten, General Kindergarten, and State Kindergarten are essential for fostering student social initiatives and tolerance. It represents religious tolerance. A similar opinion is expressed by Ade Jamarudin et al., (2022), that the attitude of religious moderation includes respecting others' beliefs. Thus, the differences present are not reasons for hostility but opportunities for coexistence. This research aligns with the findings by Ahmad Marzuki et al., (2021), which highlights those social activities that are also reciprocated among followers of different religions. Tolerance is manifested through joint activities involving all religions in these three kindergartens. During religious holiday celebrations, non-Muslim children, such as those practicing Christianity and Buddhism, also participate in these events. For instance, during the zakat activities, non-Muslim parents enthusiastically engage, just as they do when sharing *takjil*. These activities foster care and solidarity among humans and highlight the importance of harmonious living in a diverse society.

Furthermore, social activities that involve all religions create an inclusive atmosphere that encourages mutual respect and empathy among students. By recognizing and understanding differences, children will be better prepared to face challenges in their social lives. This approach also helps cultivate a high sense of solidarity, vital for building a harmonious community. Through the development of tolerance, children are taught not to view differences as barriers but as wealth that enriches their lives. Overall, these efforts will result in a generation that is more sensitive to social issues and more prepared to contribute to a pluralistic society.

Challenges and Benefits of Implementing Religious Moderation Programs

The first challenge in creating a multicultural learning environment is the difference in perspectives and understanding of religion. Each religion has its own beliefs, practices, and values, and when students from different religious backgrounds interact, these differences can trigger tension. For instance, at General Kindergarten, the principal explained the challenge of balancing the national curriculum with introducing local culture. They strive to respect and reflect the diverse religious backgrounds of students; however, this process requires special attention to ensure all parties feel involved.

Next, another challenge is the difficulty of building understanding and respect for religious differences. Formal education should be a means to develop understanding, tolerance, and appreciation for religious differences. However, its implementation can be challenging. Teachers must have adequate knowledge and understanding of various religions to provide inclusive education and avoid bias or discrimination (Munawar Rahmat and M. Wildan Bin H. M. Yahya, 2022). Building awareness and appreciation for religious differences among students is also essential. A sensitive and open approach is needed to teach inclusion, respect, and interfaith dialogue values (Ranjit Singha and Surjit Singha, 2023). Given that the majority of educators in our country are Muslim, the imbalance of religious representation in these institutions can sometimes lead to indirect discrimination against minorities. If not addressed, this issue will also gradually become evident among students.

Early childhood has its own uniqueness and characteristics according to the developmental stage (Romi Fajar Tanjung et al., 2024). Educational development efforts should be tailored to these childhood characteristics through play activities. In practice, local

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cultural wisdom can be presented as learning themes. These themes serve to unify the content of the curriculum into a holistic planning framework, enrich children's vocabulary, and make learning more meaningful. Thus, the theme becomes the focus of planning or the starting point in the learning process.

Curriculum development, as the primary substance in education, needs to be decentralized according to the needs of students, school conditions, and local circumstances (Clive Dimmock et al., 2021). Regions or schools must be able to design and determine what will be taught. Given the diverse conditions and potentials of regions in Indonesia, regions need to enhance these potentials through education in schools. Integrating the national and local curricula reflects efforts to build relevant and contextual education for children. The curriculum can be adapted by understanding local characteristics and needs to make learning more meaningful for children (Dimmock et al., 2021). This process requires a careful approach, where teachers must be able to bridge both curricula without disregarding either one. Engaging parents and the community in the learning process is essential (Chima Abimbola Eden, et.al., 2024). By doing so, schools can foster a harmonious relationship between the values imparted in the classroom and those within the community. It strengthens support for educational programs and helps children feel more connected to their social environment.

The benefits of religious moderation in educational institutions are highly significant in creating an inclusive, harmonious, and tolerant learning environment. Through inclusive religious education, students are taught to understand and appreciate differences, which can reduce excessive religious fanaticism (Rahmat & Yahya, 2022). Well-implemented religious education not only helps shape students' moral and character development but also encourages the growth of empathy and peacefulness, ultimately fostering harmony in the school environment. The primary strength of religious moderation lies in its capacity to address the root causes of fanaticism—ignorance and fear of the unfamiliar. Inclusive education helps dispel misconceptions and prejudices that may otherwise grow unchecked by cultivating awareness of religious diversity. Focusing on peace education and multiculturalism broadens students' worldviews, encouraging them to see beyond their religious identities and connect with others based on shared human values. It creates a fertile ground for the development of empathy, where students not only tolerate but also appreciate and respect the differences among their peers.

The inclusive approach to religious education involves diversity awareness and focuses on peace education and multiculturalism (Martin Ubani et al., 2020). Teachers from various religious backgrounds, such as Christianity, and Islam, play an active role in training students to develop a sense of religious moderation. They work together to provide interfaith understanding, enabling students to cultivate a peaceful and tolerant character. Schools become a vital setting where students learn to appreciate differences through diverse social interactions (Linda S. Levstik and C. Barton Keith, 2022).

A concrete example of the benefits of religious moderation can be seen in several kindergartens in Ponorogo. At General Kindergarten, children are taught to value diversity as part of everyday life. This program helps foster a sense of tolerance and appreciation for religious and cultural diversity among the children. At State Kindergarten, multicultural education enriches the learning experience through cultural and local language activities, helping children develop positive attitudes towards differences from an early age. At Islamic Kindergarten, the religious moderation program successfully creates an inclusive learning environment where children are taught to appreciate differences through cultural activities and religious practices.

In conclusion, the benefits of religious moderation in educational institutions are profound, particularly in fostering a moderate attitude and appreciation for diversity among students. Through inclusive religious education, open dialogue, interfaith cooperation, and teacher training, educational institutions can become harmonious spaces where tolerance and peace flourish. With a harmonious classroom environment, the broader school environment is

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expected to reflect peace and inclusion, free from discrimination against those who are different or part of minority groups (Ana Minniswatil Maghfiroh, Danu Sugiarto, and Akhyak, 2024). By equipping students with the skills to understand and celebrate diversity, we prepare them to thrive in an increasingly interconnected world, laying the groundwork for a future where peace and mutual respect are the norms.

One of the main benefits of religious moderation in educational institutions is its ability to strengthen tolerance and appreciation for religious differences. Teaching religious tolerance early on is very important because, through understanding and awareness of tolerance, children can adopt appropriate attitudes and behaviours in their daily lives. Educational institutions play a vital and ongoing role in instilling these values and developing mutual understanding and empathy towards followers of other religions (Anne Suryani and A. Bukhori Muslim, et.al., 2024). Second, instilling tolerance in educational institutions helps address prejudices and negative stereotypes that often arise related to religion. By learning about different religions, students can see their similarities and realize that prejudices are unfounded (Maykel Verkuyten, Kumar Yogeeswaran, and Levi Adelman, 2020). Third, educational institutions can create a safe and inclusive environment for all students by emphasizing tolerance values. In a supportive environment, students feel valued and accepted regardless of their religious beliefs. It can encourage positive personal growth and enhance social relationships among students. Fourth, instilling tolerance in educational institutions teaches students the importance of effective dialogue and communication. They learn to listen, speak respectfully, and understand others' perspectives. This ability will be invaluable when students interact with a religiously diverse society. Finally, educational institutions can serve as models of tolerance for students. Teachers and school staff can provide a real example of respecting other religions and treating others well by creating an environment that respects and appreciates diversity. (Kurian, 2024).

The Role of Educators in Promoting Religious Moderation and Cultivating Multicultural Values

As conservators, teachers are responsible for upholding and preserving religious moderation values in schools. This role becomes particularly vital at the early childhood education level, as this is a formative period for character development. The early introduction of values such as tolerance, justice, balance, and simplicity significantly shape students' attitudes toward diversity as they grow (Khan & Chandel, 2021). In these settings, teachers convey the values of religious moderation through formal instruction and by creating environments where students can experience and practice these values first-hand. This experiential learning helps ensure that religious moderation is not merely a concept but an integral part of the student's everyday lives. Teachers act as protectors of these values, ensuring they are kept relevant, alive, and applicable in students' lives both within the school and beyond (Koslouski & Stark, 2021). The role of teachers goes beyond academic instruction, as they play a crucial part in shaping students' social and moral development. Huda's research highlights the internalization of religious moderation values through planning, implementing, organizing, and evaluating Islamic education (Huda, 2024).

As role models, teachers at these three kindergartens serve real-life examples for students practicing religious moderation and appreciating diversity. Young children tend to imitate the behaviors they observe from adults, making it crucial for teachers to demonstrate tolerance, fairness, and balance in every interaction. The findings of this study are consistent with research by Apetatu, which emphasizes the crucial role of teachers as models for students, particularly in exemplifying a moderate way of life (Apetatu, 2024). By serving as good role models, teachers teach students that those differences are natural and should be respected (Lian et al., 2020). This attitude helps shape children into individuals who are tolerant and appreciative of diversity. Bandura's social learning theory, as cited by Ahn et al., explains that individuals learn by observing and imitating the behaviors of others (Ahn et al.,

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2020). In this context, teachers who consistently display positive social interactions create an environment where religious moderation can flourish, fostering empathy and open-mindedness in students.

As facilitators, teachers create a conducive learning environment to promote religious moderation and multiculturalism through interactive and collaborative teaching methods. Teachers deliver content and encourage students to learn through interaction and direct experience. As facilitators, teachers must also be flexible in adjusting teaching methods to meet the needs of diverse students. This study aligns with Apetatu's research, which highlights teachers' essential role as facilitators in the learning process, showcasing aspects of moderation (Apetatu, 2024). Teachers ensure that each student feels valued and actively engaged in learning in a multicultural environment like these kindergartens. Teachers ensure that religious moderation is not just a theory but is practiced in real life through student interactions in class and collaborative activities that promote brotherhood amid differences. Vygotsky in Alharbi emphasizes the importance of social interaction in children’s cognitive development (Alharbi, 2022).

Additionally, research by Roldán et al. supports the idea that experience-based and interactive learning approaches are highly effective in helping students understand and appreciate diversity (Molina Roldán et al., 2021). Teachers are crucial in creating a supportive atmosphere that encourages open dialogue and mutual respect. Their commitment to fostering an inclusive learning environment helps students develop the skills to thrive in a diverse society. The combination of teachers' knowledge and experiences is critical to developing new understanding for students, with the success of this process largely dependent on how well the curriculum and teaching methods are applied.

Conclusion

Integrating religious moderation in early childhood education across kindergartens in Ponorogo effectively shapes a multicultural personality in children by utilizing diverse yet complementary approaches. Each institution, Islamic Kindergarten, General Kindergarten, and State Kindergarten, demonstrates a commitment to fostering understanding, respect, and tolerance among children from various cultural and religious backgrounds. Through culturally-based activities, routine ceremonies, and inclusive religious practices, these kindergartens promote an environment where children learn to appreciate diversity as an essential part of their lives. Addressing challenges such as differing religious perspectives and balancing national and local curricula allows educators to cultivate empathy and reduce excessive fanaticism towards individual faiths. Educators play a vital role in this process, acting as conservators of cultural values, role models for acceptance and tolerance, and facilitators of engaging learning experiences. Overall, the strategies employed by these kindergartens not only enhance children’s social skills and cultural awareness but also contribute significantly to building a cohesive, tolerant society in the future. By instilling these values early on, these educational institutions are shaping a generation of open-minded, respectful, and culturally aware individuals ready to thrive in a multicultural world.

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